



LOUISIANA MARITIME ASSOCIATION

Date: 19 March 2019

To: Louisiana Maritime Association Members

Subject: 2019 Lower Mississippi River Navigation Challenges

Situation

The prolonged high river levels have caused and continue to cause ship transit challenges on the Lower Mississippi River (LMR). Even as of the writing of this correspondence, the LMR has been closed for 12 hours due to a towboat sinking and the ongoing search for a missing crewmember. Previous experienced, multiple, prolonged fog closures and high vessel volumes are just two of many additional factors which increase the complexity of scheduling pilots, coordinating pilot exchanges, USCG, USFGIS, and NCB inspections, docking/berthing times, sailing and departure times, cargo operations, bunkering, ordering tugs/tug availability, etc. As a result, ship calls to facilities on the LMR are facing longer than normal turn-around times.

Discussion

Below is a summary of the current conditions and complicating factors:

Prolonged High River Levels.

- The LMR at New Orleans has been above 12' (High River Restrictions) since December 17, 2018. (See attached)
- The LMR at Baton Rouge has been above 35' (Flood Stage) since January 28, 2019.

Limited Tug Availability.

The below operations result in a limited number of tugs available for vessel-assist in anchoring, mooring, etc. Ships are competing for tugs and face transit and berthing delays until tugs are available.

- An unusually high number of tugs are being used for hold-in service at docks as required by the terminal and/or Pilot/Master.
- The USCG requires a tug escort for vessels transiting upbound past the I-10 Bridge to dock (and vice versa).
- The CRPPA Pilots require two tractor tugs when mooring a vessel at Chalmette Slip.
- CRPPA Pilots also require a tug escort for southbound vessels drafting 30 feet or greater, when the pilot is ordered after 1600 hours, and fog is predicted.



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Limited Anchorage Space.

Due to strong river currents, ships are dragging anchors leading to lost anchors, breaking chains, and snagging of debris. As a result, General Anchorage is closed, and in some areas Pilots remain on board vessels in anchorages to maintain or repositions ships as needed.

- Belmont – Limited to one vessel due to sunken vessel.
- General Anchorage – Closed. Vessels can't hold position due to current.
- Baton Rouge Anchorage – Closed due to sunken vessel.
- Bonne Carre Anchorage – Closed due to opening of spillway.
- All Anchorages – High river levels and associated high river currents require more space between anchored vessels reducing the number of vessel spots in the anchorages.
- Other anchorages in NOBRA Pilot area – Pilots asking vessels not to proceed upriver to anchorages unless planned stay in anchorage is limited to short (1-2 days).

Daylight-only transit and operation restrictions.

- NOBRA Pilots: MM 233.0 to MM 90.5, southbound vessels daylight only.
- NOBRA Pilots: MM 170.0 to MM 232.2, all vessels daylight only.
- NOBRA Pilots: Any mooring operations that require a boat to handle lines conducted during daylight only.
- CRPPA Pilots: Any mooring operations that require a boat to handle lines conducted during daylight only.
- Federal Pilots: Any mooring operations that require a boat to handle lines conducted during daylight only.
- CRPPA Pilots: Mooring at Chalmette Slip is daylight only.
- CRPPA Pilots: Any 'head down' mooring is daylight only.
- USCG: MM 170 to MM 182 all vessels daylight only.

One-way only transit restrictions.

- CRPPA (Pilots): MM 1.5 to MM 4.5, vessels of 40' or greater, one-way only.
- USCG: Only one vessel at a time allowed underway between I-10 and US 190 Bridge. (Baton Rouge Area ... MM 229 to MM 234)

High-tide entry restriction.

- Due to flocculation in Southwest Pass, all inbound vessels with a draft of 38 feet or greater are limited to an entry window of 3 hours after low-tide to 3 hours after high-tide. (Note: This restrictions was in place from 11/26/2018 – 03/17/2019)



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Draft limitations.

- The high river levels deposit silt in Southwest Pass, Head of Passes, and Cubit's Gap. Dredging operations are unable to maintain the federally authorized channel depth. The controlling vessel draft is now 41 feet, down from 47 feet. (Southwest Pass and Mississippi River Draft Recommendations and Restrictions are based on FULL FRESH WATER. Not salt or brackish.)

Fog and other delays.

- The USCG has closed the LMR at Algiers Point (MM 94.0 to MM 95.0) approximately 25 times to date in 2019. (Algiers Point closures however basically result in a complete river shutdown.)
- Prolonged periods of fog on the lower reaches of the LMR and at SWP have caused additional vessel transit interruptions.
- A number of vessel incidents including towboat sinking's, barge sinking's, and vessel groundings have resulted in partial river closures for various length of times.
- Attached is a listing of the 2019 navigation closures. Note, interruptions to vessel cross-ins and cross-outs at SWP due to heavy fog do not result in official USCG navigation closures. Pilot discretion applies to such situations.

Conclusion.

Current forecasts indicate river levels will remain elevated at least through April 5, 2019. Additional rainfall amounts on the upper river systems coupled with spring snow melt will undoubtedly extend the period of high river conditions. These river conditions coupled with the continued high volume of vessel traffic will continue to challenge maritime operations. Accordingly, all involved parties should expect delays in vessel movements and longer, possibly costlier port calls.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ron Branch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ron" being more prominent than the last name "Branch".

Ronald W. Branch
Captain, USCG (Ret.)
President

Louisiana Maritime Association



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2019 - Navigation Closures

Date	Location	Closure	Reopened	Reason
12/31/18-1/1/19	MM229.5-MM230.5 AHP	2330 local	0100 local	fireworks
12/31/18-1/1/19	MM94.0-MM95.0 AHP	2330 local	0030 local	fireworks
1/1/19	MM94.0-MM95.0 AHP	1230 local	0636 local	fog
1/2/19	MM94.0-MM95.0 AHP	0130 local	2030 local	fog
1/2/-1/3/19	MM94.0-MM95.0 AHP	1119 local	0200 local	fog
1/4/19	MM3.5 AHP	0858 local	1742 local	grounded vessel
1/10/19	MM3.2 AHP	0439 local	0705 local	grounded vessel
1/16/19	MM15.0-MM18.0 AHP	1110 local	2049 local	capsized pleasure craft
2/3/2019-2/4/19	MM94.0-MM95.0 AHP	1859 local	1145 local	fog
2/4/2019-2/5/19	MM94.0-MM95.0 AHP	2130 local	1315 local	fog
2/5/19-2/6/19	MM94.0-MM95.0 AHP	2230 local	0817 local	fog
2/10/19-2/11/19	MM94.0-MM95.0 AHP	1634 local	1100 local	fog
2/11/19-2/12/19	MM94.0-MM95.0 AHP	2041 local	0143 local	fog
2/16/19	MM94.0-MM95.0 AHP	0730 local	0940 local	fog
2/19/19-2/20/19	MM94.0-MM95.0 AHP	1530 local	0130 local	fog
2/21/19	MM94.0-MM95.0 AHP	0125 local	1027 local	fog
2/28/19	MM94.0-MM95.0 AHP	0650 local	0990 local	fog
3/1/19	MM94.0-MM95.0 AHP	0445 local	1130 local	fog
3/1/19-3/2/19	MM94.0-MM95.0 AHP	2300 local	0930 local	fog
3/3/19	MM94.0-MM95.0 AHP	0500 local	0845 local	fog
3/4/19	MM94.0-MM96.0 AHP	1745 local	1845 local	fireworks
3/9/19	MM94.0-MM96.0 AHP	0656 local	0933 local	fog
3/10/19	MM152.0-MM156.0	2217 local	1730 local	sunken barge
3/11/19	MM94.0-MM96.0 AHP	0030 local	1100 local	fog
3/14/19	MM224.0-MM226.5 AHP	1156 local	1800 local	sunken-towboat
3/18/19	MM55.0-MM58 AHP	2130 local	Ongoing	sunken-T/B-SAR.OPS



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Historic Data For Mississippi River at New Orleans (Carrollton) (01300)

Stream Name: Mississippi River Longitude: -90.13611111
 Gage Zero: 0 Ft. GAGE Latitude: 29.93472222
 Flood Stage: 17 Ft. River Mile: 102.8
 Record High Stage : 21.27 Ft. Record High Stage Date: 04/25/1922
 Location of Gage:

Corps of Engineer's dock on left descending bank at river mile 102.8. Natural flow is affected by tides.

Adjustment for vertical datum **NAVD88 (2009.55): -0.82 ft.**
 (e.g. for data relative to NAVD88 subtract 0.82 ft.)

LWRP 2007 (Low Water Reference Plane) has been defined
 with respect to NAVD88 (2009.55), corrections valid as of Sept 20, 2011.

** Raw data, subject to change **

[Download Data](#)

08:00 Central

Date / Time	Stage (Ft)
01/01/2019 08:00	12.40
01/02/2019 08:00	12.53
01/03/2019 08:00	12.73
01/04/2019 08:00	13.05
01/05/2019 08:00	13.18
01/06/2019 08:00	13.37
01/07/2019 08:00	13.51
01/08/2019 08:00	13.70
01/09/2019 08:00	13.85
01/10/2019 08:00	13.99
01/11/2019 08:00	14.25
01/12/2019 08:00	14.40
01/13/2019 08:00	14.58
01/14/2019 08:00	14.78
01/15/2019 08:00	14.86
01/16/2019 08:00	15.00
01/17/2019 08:00	15.12
01/18/2019 08:00	15.20
01/19/2019 08:00	15.40
01/20/2019 08:00	15.24
01/21/2019 08:00	15.46
01/22/2019 08:00	15.46
01/23/2019 08:00	15.59
01/24/2019 08:00	15.36
01/25/2019 08:00	15.17
01/26/2019 08:00	14.90
01/27/2019 08:00	14.79
01/28/2019 08:00	14.68
01/29/2019 08:00	14.58
01/30/2019 08:00	14.55
01/31/2019 08:00	14.50
02/01/2019 08:00	14.52
02/02/2019 08:00	14.55
02/03/2019 08:00	14.50



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02/04/2019 08:00	14.54
02/05/2019 08:00	14.53
02/06/2019 08:00	14.48
02/07/2019 08:00	14.37
02/08/2019 08:00	14.27
02/09/2019 08:00	14.17
02/10/2019 08:00	14.00
02/11/2019 08:00	13.96
02/12/2019 08:00	13.87
02/13/2019 08:00	13.59
02/14/2019 08:00	13.56
02/15/2019 08:00	13.55
02/16/2019 08:00	13.62
02/17/2019 08:00	13.72
02/18/2019 08:00	13.99
02/19/2019 08:00	14.56
02/20/2019 08:00	14.65
02/21/2019 08:00	14.73
02/22/2019 08:00	14.85
02/23/2019 08:00	15.12
02/24/2019 08:00	15.01
02/25/2019 08:00	15.40
02/26/2019 08:00	15.64
02/27/2019 08:00	16.01
02/28/2019 08:00	16.01
03/01/2019 08:00	16.15
03/02/2019 08:00	16.17
03/03/2019 08:00	16.35
03/04/2019 08:00	16.52
03/05/2019 08:00	16.49
03/06/2019 08:00	16.65
03/07/2019 08:00	16.65
03/08/2019 08:00	16.57
03/09/2019 08:00	16.64
03/10/2019 08:00	16.73
03/11/2019 08:00	16.71
03/12/2019 08:00	16.77
03/13/2019 08:00	16.72
03/14/2019 08:00	16.66
03/15/2019 08:00	16.71
03/16/2019 08:00	16.76
03/17/2019 08:00	16.86
03/18/2019 08:00	16.78

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